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AUTHOR Vandegrift, Judith A.; Dickey, Linda
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ABSTRACT

Twenty of 26 active members of the Governor's School to Work (STW) Advisory Council shared their views of and expectations for Arizona's STW initiative. The STW transition occurred in one of three ways: instructors in vocational programs had linkages with employers; a program, school or district had a placement person to facilitate students' STW transitions; and students were tossed into the milieu of work. Three major, interrelated themes related to state-level issues that needed to be addressed to improve the STW transition emerged: state commitment to and unilateral support for the initiative; communication and education about STW; and business/community involvement. Key building blocks of a state system were postulated as follows: a state infrastructure that steered STW activities and provided consistency and continuity of purpose; programs for elementary and secondary students that integrated academic and vocational learning through linked work- and school-based activities; university and continuing education programs for teachers and counselors that reinforced the concept of the value of work; a technological infrastructure that supported the programmatic elements of STW; and business and community involvement. The top three outcomes that the STW system should be able to demonstrate were happier, more satisfied students; changes in the value placed on STW; and employer satisfaction. Three key roles for council members were identified: policy advisors/problem solvers, decision makers, and advocates/liaisons. (YLB)

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Conversations with Arizona's School To Work Advisory Council

Arizona School To Work Briefing Paper #1 *July 1996*

by
Judith A. Vandegrift with Linda Dickey
Research Analysts, Morrison Institute for Public Policy

There are 26 active members of the Governor's School To Work (STW) Advisory Council. Between May and July of 1996, members of the council were asked to participate in a series of interviews conducted by ASU's Morrison Institute for Public Policy—the agency contracted by the Governor's Division of School To Work to coordinate the evaluation of Arizona's STW initiative. Twenty members consented to share their views on issues related to developing a state system of STW opportunities for Arizona's youth.

The primary purpose of the interviews was to elicit council members' views of and expectations for Arizona's STW initiative. A second reason for the interviews was to clarify the mission of the council itself. This briefing paper highlights salient points from the council interviews. Most interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Quotes are used verbatim.

How (and how well) does the transition from school to work currently occur in Arizona?

In the words of one council member, the transition from school to work currently occurs in Arizona in one of three ways:

1) Instructors in vocational programs have linkages with employers.
2) A program, school, or district has a placement person to facilitate students' transitions from school to work.
3) Students are "tossed into the milieu of work and do the best they can."

Specific successful programs or schools that facilitate students' transitions from school to work are seen as few and far between. A majority of council members seem to agree with the sentiment that most students are left to fend for themselves. Others noted that even when there are programs, the transition "works better" in urban and suburban areas where there are more places of employment.

Regarding *how well* the transition occurs, council members used phrases such as: "not working well at all," "poor," "terrible," "abominable," "haphazard," and "hit-and-miss." No one said the transition is occurring well.

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"Some places probably do a better job than others, but there is not a *consistency* where that is concerned."

"Right now, I don't think we're doing a real good job overall statewide with making [the transition] happen."

"We can point to some good partnerships where kids are assisted in transitioning from school to work or further education—with all the pieces that might go with that—but in large part I think that [the transition] is not happening."

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"We *have to* have a state commitment. [STW has] been given lip service, but I don't think we've ever heard a plan for reforming STW in Arizona. Are we [committed] to work in the workforce development and STW arenas when the grant funding runs out? Is there a commitment from the state, from the Governor's Office, from the agencies involved and the interagency council to make the [necessary] changes?"

"If we are to achieve a system and we are to stand in front of people and say to them—'You must put down your barriers, you must learn how to cooperate, you must learn how to align'—then it is absolutely imperative that the people who are saying those words, live those words."

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"There needs to be better education as regards the importance of STW for [all] personnel who work with children. There needs to be more a belief that schools have a responsibility to prepare students for the work of work—and that it's not someone else's responsibility, but the school's responsibility....And I think that happens by looking at teacher preparation."

"I think the players—particularly the K-12 enterprise—need to understand much more of what is ultimately expected of students when they graduate from high school and college."

What do you think needs to happen to improve the STW transition in our state?

Overall, council members focused on state-level issues which they felt need to be addressed in order to improve the STW transition in Arizona. Three major, interrelated themes emerged. These are presented in no particular order of importance.

State Commitment to and Unilateral Support for the School To Work Initiative

Several council members alluded to a need for the "state" to take a clear stand on STW. Many members expressed a desire for stronger leadership from the Governor, state legislature, Arizona Department of Education, and other agencies in supporting the concept of school to work. In part, "stronger leadership" at the state level translates to "model[ing] the collaborative relationships that they're expecting on the consortium level. [The state] needs to be showing us that they're dealing with legislative issues at the state level so that we can deal with our own legislative board issues at the consortium level."

Over one-quarter of those interviewed expressed concern that STW has become too politicized and may be the demise of the initiative. Members stated that apolitical support for STW is needed. In particular, an alignment of policies, messages, and actions between the Governor's Office and Arizona Department of Education was felt to be essential in order to improve the STW transition in Arizona.

Communication and Education about School To Work

Virtually all council members cited a need for better communication about the STW initiative. Education to promote awareness needs to occur at all levels: the public, business and industry community, legislature, and—most significantly—among educators. Whether described as a "paradigm shift," "change in the whole state and national culture relative to [school]," or a "whole new mind set," council members agree that the STW initiative needs to be well-publicized and marketed throughout the state so that it is perceived as what it is—a major education reform initiative.

A related aspect of the educational process relates to teacher training. Over half of the council members said that *changes in the university preparation of new teachers* would help to improve students' transitions in Arizona. Additionally, in the words of another council member, there needs to be "massive inservice" for practicing teachers—especially at the elementary level.

Business/Community Involvement

A majority of council members also stated that greater participation and "buy-in" from the business and industry community—especially from state-level trade/labor organizations and associations—is essential in order to improve STW transitions in the state. In part, council members suggested that greater involvement needs to happen by "finding out what businesses need." Several mentioned that a planning process similar to the one used to develop the Arizona Strategic Plan for Economic Development (ASPED) might be beneficial. The bottom line is that greater business involvement is perceived as necessary in order to create and expand work-based experiences for Arizona's youth.

"We need to get the community involved and I think to get the community involved, we have to be more willing to listen to their needs. We can't say: 'We want you to help us in the school with these students and we're going to tell you what you're going to do.'"

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"When we talk about a state system...we generally talk about a set of protocols that are consistent across the state. With education, it's a little different... Communities have different needs...but I think that one of the basic elements of a state system would be to have some consistency—at least in the basic agreement of what STW is and how it's going to work."

"The state should be the guiding light...The main focus at the state level should be those 'barrier busters' that if I'm over here and my district doesn't want to do anything, but I *know* this is the way to go, then I have somebody at the state level who [will] come in and rattle a few cages and say, "*This* is where we're headed. *This* is what we need to do.'"

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"Elements are programs...that provide school-based and work-based learning opportunities and the [means] to ensure that learning opportunities are connected in a meaningful and progressive way."

What are the basic elements of a state system?

There is no consensus on what a "system" is or its basic elements. Each council member's response to this question was unique. However, based on a cumulative analysis of the interviews, key building blocks of a state system are postulated as follows:

A **state infrastructure** that:

- steers STW activities in the state and provides consistency and "continuity of purpose"
- communicates continuously the importance of STW via the media and telecommunications
- generates new standards and criteria for high school graduation
- obtains or promotes agreement on industry-developed skills standards and creates the mechanism(s) for implementing industry standards in the schools
- develops funding alternatives and mechanisms for sustainability of the STW initiative
- changes laws and policies that impede STW/creates new laws and policies that foster STW

Programs for elementary and secondary students that:

- require the acquisition and demonstration of basic skills
- integrate academic and vocational learning through linked work-based and school-based activities

"I think one of the key pieces is the career development piece... It's a concept—a philosophy—that [allows] students in all grades to see that what they're learning is to match who they are and what they can contribute."

"We have an environment in education that reinforces a set of values that...[workplaces don't share]. And an example I like to use is a little one....attendance policies in our schools are totally opposite of what the real world is at the workplace. I mean, we have ten unexcused absences per semester. [If] you have ten unexcused absences in the workplace, you won't be there."

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"Kids, even young ones, intuitively 'get' that what they're learning is not connected to anything that they'll ever use in their life....'Employability' has to be woven into the fabric of teacher preparation across courses so that teachers understand how to make—and teach—connections between classroom learning and life."

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"[We need] a workforce development database that allows students to access job information in the county, state, and nation...."

incorporate multiple student assessments throughout a student's K-12 experience

provide career exploration/guidance activities at each grade level

offer bona fide work experience to any student who wants it prior to graduation from high school

produce high school seniors exiting the K-12 system who:
- —have chosen a career field
- —know their options for how to pursue their career of choice
- —have credentials or certification (other than a diploma)

adopt policies that support workplace expectations (e.g., change attendance policies to disallow unexcused absences)

University and continuing education programs for teachers and counselors that:

"reinforce the concept of the value of work"

provide "constant opportunities for educators to be involved and look at what's happening in the world of work"

teach teachers how to integrate "employability" skills throughout the curriculum

A technological infrastructure that:

supports the programmatic elements of STW (e.g., "a computer in every classroom")

fosters communication among all parties (e.g., via the Internet and E-mail)

provides access to a "clearinghouse where people can access information any time they need to implement, reinforce, or develop a STW system"

facilitates data collection and management

Business and community involvement that:

provides access to "real" work-based experiences in *every* community in the state

What are three simple outcomes which the "new" STW system, when fully implemented, should be able to demonstrate clearly?

Cumulatively, council members listed over 30 unique outcomes of a fully implemented STW system. The top three outcomes (based on the frequency with which they were mentioned) are as follows:

1) "Happier," "more satisfied students"—particularly as evidenced by lower dropout rates

2) Changes in how education and STW is viewed/changes in the value placed on STW

3) "Employer satisfaction"

Most of the other cited outcomes fall into one of three categories.

Student-centered outcomes such as:

Evidence that students are acquiring workplace skills

Evidence of higher academic skills

Increasing numbers of students exposed to work prior to high school graduation

More students identifying their career options prior to high school graduation

More high school seniors graduating with certificates of competence

Higher student enrollment in postsecondary (either community college or university) ***career-track*** education

Higher retention of STW students in postsecondary education

More students having made a ***successful*** transition from school—be it high school, community college, or a four-year institution—to work (e.g., within ten years of high school graduation)

Programmatic outcomes such as:

Statewide availability of apprenticeships

Business partnerships in every community

"If you've got kids who are jazzed on learning, regardless of what it looks like for them, then they're going to be successful forever....The tragedy is that [we don't] have enough kids who really are excited by, or at least aren't turned off by, learning. To my mind, that translates to lower dropout rates."

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"We have to fundamentally change the philosophy of schools and...in business as well...What we should be saying is: 'We've got an opportunity here [to do] what we ***know*** is right. Better businesses need good people; kids would benefit from a school system that would help them better transition into that. [We need] to create a climate in this state."

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"Outcome number one would be employers satisfied with the 'products' of the local school systems K through higher [education]. If an employer in 1996 is unable to fill their jobs [locally]...and they have to either recruit from the outside or do a hell of a lot of training, and they are frustrated with the public school system enterprise, and in the year 2006 they are filling their jobs very adequately from local sources, and they can reduce their training requirements, and they have employees who are staying with them and advancing, that's the measure to me of a high functioning system."

When we talk about a well-functioning system, how do we measure "well-functioning"?

Our measurements should be driven by who our ultimate customer is—I think our customer is the students.

Well-functioning can only be measured if you have goals and the goals are specific and measurable.

We need outcome data—good outcome data and anecdotal data...and we need longitudinal data.

There are some times that there won't be measurable improvement, perhaps, but there will be efficient functioning which I think is synonymous with well-functioning....you look at efficient functioning by seeing whether or not what's planned is occurring in a timely fashion, if the people that you expected to come on board *are* on board, if people are following through with what they promised—I think that would be functioning efficiently.

The system must continuously obtain data that can be used to analyze the effectiveness of the system as well as the individual elements.

Statewide accessibility of programs and resources/more programs in place

Changes in guidance counseling

Clear articulation between K-12, higher education, and the business community

More [high school] vocational education for students who don't want to go to junior college or a four-year college

Economic outcomes such as:

Positive influx in the Arizona economy/economic growth

Higher employment

Lower unemployment

Additional, miscellaneous "priority" outcomes for council members include:

Changes in how ***educators*** view themselves

A community that recognizes its responsibility to support education

Equal opportunities for rural students to participate in "realistic work-based learning"

Better relationships and communication between the education and business communities

Everyone connected to the Internet

A workforce development database

[Teacher] understanding of what makes a successful internship

The role of the STW Advisory Council and council members

Beginning interviews were used to elicit council members' views on what they perceived their role(s) to be. Subsequent interviews were used as a "reality check" to discuss and refine these roles. It should be noted that not all council members agreed on the nature of the council's role or the types of information that would be most helpful to them in fulfilling their charge.

The purpose of Arizona's STW Advisory Council is to guide state-level policy and practice as these pertain to reforming public education and reinventing government in order to better prepare Arizona's students for further education, training and the world of work.

Based on all interviews, the purpose of the council was clarified and refined, and three key roles for council members were identified as discussed below.

The STW Council as Policy Advisors/Problem-Solvers

First and foremost, council members see themselves as policy advisors and problem-solvers. There are constantly emerging issues at the state and local levels for which there are no immediate solutions or clear course of action. These are the issues of most interest to the council.

> Information needs: background material on the issue, if available, supplemented by the occasional presentation from an expert in the field and/or party directly and adversely affected by the existing policy or practice

"I keep hearing that there are problems that the council will be asked to solve. I think that's legitimate. What are they? Ask us to solve them....Let us talk about them. Let us brainstorm. Let us come up with some solutions to the problem. ***Don't*** bring us together and say 'Here's the problem and let me tell you what I think the solutions should be and you can pick from a list of three."

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The STW Council as Decision-Makers

Council members also view themselves as decision-makers. In this capacity, the council will enact decisions that affect the "course" of Arizona's STW initiative. As one council member put it, the council should provide "cover" for staff on issues which are "hot to handle" without the sanction of the state's STW governing body.

> Information needs: well-developed, researched briefs with options for discussion

"Come in and say in an unbiased way—'Here's the problem. Here's what we found. Here are some options. We need a decision.' That's what [the council] is here for."

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The STW Council as Advocates/Liaisons

Council members view themselves as advocates for the STW initiative. In this capacity, council members are expected to represent STW interests among the constituency group that they represent—be it the legislature, business community, or education community. They might serve as media spokespersons, write op-ed articles, or visit STW sites. Several council members expressed an opinion that members can best advocate for STW if they are "connected" to local efforts.

> Information needs: ***brief*** information updates on state and local efforts

"The people on the council need to be in tune with the trenches a little bit. They don't need to be sitting up there on a pedestal saying, 'Give me all this wonderful data and I'll make a decision,' because then they get out of touch. I think they need some type of tie-in back into the trenches at whatever level...for a reality check, so that we're on track with what needs to happen."

Sincere thanks to the following members of
Arizona's School To Work Advisory Council

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Mr. Jose Bernal
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Arizona Department of Economic Security, Phoenix

Mr. Bob Bonura
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Ms. Barbara Clark
Motorola, Phoenix

Mr. Richard Condit
Sundt Corporation, Phoenix

Mr. Jim Cox
Arizona Private School Association, Phoenix

Mr. David Curd
Gateway Community High School, Phoenix

Ms. Jenny Erwin
Arizona Department of Education, Phoenix

Dr. Mary Garcia
Sunnyside Unified School District, Tucson

Ms. Lisa Graham-Keegan
Arizona Department of Education, Phoenix

Mr. Gordon Hall
State Board of Directors of Community College, Phoenix

Dr. Charles Losh
Arizona Department of Education, Phoenix

Ms. Gaye Luna
Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff

Dr. Rob Melnick
Morrison Institute for Public Policy, Tempe

Mr. Ray Nadolny
Cochise College, Sierra Vista

Mr. Richard Saenz
Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, Benson

The Honorable Dan Schottel
Arizona House of Representatives
Tucson

The Honorable Ruth Solomon
Arizona State Senate
Tucson

Ms. Margaret Walker
Arizona Hotel & Motel Association
Phoenix

Members of the council unable to be interviewed:

Ms. Mary Black
Teen Choice Leadership Academy
Phoenix

Mr. Samuel Engram
American Express, Phoenix

Ms. Sara Dial
Arizona Department of Commerce
Phoenix

Mr. Charles Huggins
AFL-CIO, Phoenix

Mr. Douglas Stephens
Hughes Missile Systems, Tucson

Mr. Richard Wilson
JMW Truss, Yuma

Arizona's SCHOOLTOWORK SYSTEM

For additional information about Arizona's School To Work initiative, contact:

The Governor's Division of School To Work

(602) 542-2378

Gary Abraham, Director
Mimi Gulden, Marketing Coordinator
Cynthia Yorks, Administrative Assistant